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ABSTRACT

This paper presents material from interviews with Israeli Jews and Arabs concerning the Intifada (Palestinian uprising to gain freedom from Israeli rule); interviews were conducted during a visit to Israel. The material is offered to teachers interested in teaching about the Arab-Israeli conflict. An analysis of the interviews revealed several conclusions, including: there was very little personal interaction between Israeli Jews and Arabs, the majority of Jews interviewed were willing to give up land for peace, and the majority of Arab Israelis interviewed wanted peace and the freedom to choose their own destiny. A number of activities for teachers to conduct with students are suggested. (DB)

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by
Carol Marie Ridarelli

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Intifada: Voices of the People in the Arab-Israeli Conflict

By Carol Marie Ridarelli

Since December of 1987, a new concept known as the intifada has been added to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Intifada in Arabic literally means "shaking off;" it refers to the current Palestinian uprising to gain freedom from Israeli rule. To some people the intifada is associated with the violence of young Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, but to others it is a viable path taken to gain the freedom to choose one's own destiny.

There are many facets of the intifada. Some Palestinians believe it is the only way left for them to gain a separate nation composed of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and possibly East Jerusalem. Other Palestinians believe that the intifada is a means to gain the same full rights as the Israeli citizens, which is associated with being treated with respect and dignity.

To some Israeli Jews, the intifada is a continuation of the war between the Jews and Arabs since 1947; it is the struggle for the survival of the state of Israel as a Jewish nation in a sea of Arab nations. Yet to other Israelis, the intifada reinforces the idea that peace must be made between the two conflicting groups.

There are many opinions on the subject of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially the intifada, yet we tend only to hear the opinions of the politicians and not the average person. In the summer of 1989, I visited Israel on a Fulbright scholarship. I chose to research this subject by interviewing people from all walks of life and creating lessons teachers could use.

I tried to interview the "average" person, Israeli Jew and Arab, yet I was not able to interview Palestinians living in the occupied territories who are not citizens of Israel. I asked those interviewed for their age, occupation, religion, and place of residence. Then I proceeded to ask what their opinion was on the intifada and solutions they had on the conflict.

Not all of the questions were answered entirely, often due to the language barriers, but I did gain enough information and insight into the situation to form some conclusions.

OBJECTIVES

The student will:

locate on a map the nations of the Middle East and within the nation of Israel will locate the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Jerusalem.

investigate the causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1947 to the present.

compare and contrast the opinions of the Israeli Jews and Arabs concerning the conflict, specifically the intifada.

debate the Arab-Israeli conflict by researching, assessing, and proposing solutions to the Palestinian question.

CONTENT

A. The Interviews

I will begin with the interviews of the Israeli Jews. I was able to speak with eleven people, four females and seven males. Their ages range from eighteen to sixty-three.

An eighteen year old Jewish female from Jerusalem now serving in the army She is stationed in a quiet Arab refugee village.
"Fear makes the Arabs quiet. The Palestinians are right. . .the territories belong to them. . .a Palestinian state should be established. Even though I am against violence, that is the only way the Palestinians can get what they want. All Jews should be taken out of the occupied territories. I am tired of war."
She continued to explain that her parents attitudes are much like her own, yet her mother tends to believe the answer may also be that the Palestinians go and live in Jordan. And she commented that she had no Arab friends because the Arabs and Jews are different, they have nothing in common.

A twenty-two year old Jewish Orthodox male from Jerusalem attending a university. He served three years in the army in places such as the Gaza Strip and Hebron.
"The Israeli government needs to be stronger and aggressive. . .can't compromise. . .don't give Arabs the territories. . .Israel should annex the West Bank and force rule on the Arabs. I used to play with Arabs but now have no connection with them."
He stated his father wants the Arabs expelled from Israel, yet his mother believes in peaceful coexistence.

A twenty-five year old Jewish female from Jerusalem who works at the David Institute at the University of Jerusalem.
"Intifada is a natural reaction of people who are frustrated. . .it is not surprising even though it is unpleasant. I am not happy especially since my brother is stationed in the Gaza Strip. I hope it(intifada) will convince our leaders that they must reach a solution. I am willing to give land for peace. . .yet not Jerusalem. . .not even a divided Jerusalem. If there is a Palestinian state, I would want a demilitarized zone. . .maybe even a confederation of Israel and Jordan. I am against the settlements in the occupied territories and I think the only way to get our leaders to do something is with pressure from the U S."
She comments that she has no personal Arab friends, although she often came in contact with Arabs when she was a student at the university.

A twenty-five year old Jewish female dancer who is presently living on the Gaaton kibbutz.
"I would do whatever brings peace. . .but not sure what will bring peace. Would give land for peace. . .would maybe give up the Arab part of Jerusalem. I feel bad about us being the invading army. . .I would do the same even worse if I were a Palestinian. I feel the US is essential in this situation. . .Israeli existence is dependent on US so the US can put pressure on them."
She states she does have contact with Arabs, yet she doesn't trust them entirely. She also states her parents feel the same way she does about the situation.

A twenty-six year old Jewish male student in a university presently living on the Gaaton kibbutz.
"After so many years of hate I don't think we can live together peacefully. It is impossible to live with Palestinians. . .I am ready to give land to compromise, yet cannot divide Jerusalem. . .possibly autonomy for the West Bank and Gaza Strip with a link to Jordan. . .no independent state because there are many extreme forces in the Palestinian movement which can ruin Israelis existence. (Jewish)Settlements can stay if they want to live under Palestinian rule. Arafat is a moderate leader among Palestinians, if they don't negotiate with him there are more extremists."
He states that the US needs to get involved because it is a stabilizing force. He also explained he worked with Arabs, yet does not have a friendship with any due to their different cultural backgrounds.

A twenty-six year old Jewish male taxi driver from Jerusalem.
"The intifada is not good. . . but we've lived with it for twenty years. . . I won't give the Palestinians a state, but I agree to live together peacefully."

A thirty-four year old Jewish male writer from Jerusalem.
"If intifada continues or grows worse, Israelis are less likely to negotiate peace. . . the extremist Palestinians will strengthen themselves thus the Israeli army will strengthen itself. Arabs and Palestinians do not like Arafat, but Israel must deal with him. Must create a Palestinian state side by side with Israel. Palestinians deserve everything everyone else has. . . once they have a state the Palestinians need to give up part of their sovereignty for a year or two until Israels fears are eradicated. If they continue to say they want to eradicate Israel, then

they won't get a state. Need to promote commonalities between Palestinians and Israelis."

A forty year old Jewish male who works in the Foreign Press Office of the Israeli Defense Force.
"There is no instant political or military solution. . . the solution lies in both and will take a long time. Palestinians believe they have seized their own destiny into their own hands. Need joint negotiations with participation of Israeli government, Palestinians in occupied territories, and Jordanian involvement. The best the Palestinians can be offered is a state without an army. Want Arafat to stop terrorist activity not just renounce it. Israel needs to use all self-restraining methods possible. . . take methods permissible by law. . . Israel can't afford a civil war."

A fifty-seven year old Jewish male taxi driver from Jerusalem.
"No matter what the Jews did the world won't like them. I don't like killing but when someone throws rocks at you and wants to destroy all of Israel, kill them. If they(Palestinians) want to be Israeli citizens they should be quiet. . . we never destroyed a mosque, yet when they went into the old city, they destroyed synagogues. I grew up with Arabs and never trusted them."

A sixty-two year old Jewish female professor at the Hebrew University.
"Intifada has had a tremendous effect on our morals. . . we are doing things against Jewish tradition. Intifada is terrible and the response is terrible. . . we should sit down and talk. I am in favor of giving them a state because we were a stateless people. This is not a genocide just fighting for survival. . . survival means peaceful coexistence."

A sixty-three year old Jewish male professor at the Tel Aviv University.
"Intifada (on a small scale) is almost finished. . . you will see an escalation of terrorism outside the occupied territories. Should give the Palestinians the right for self-determination along side Israel and Palestinians should accept the same for Israel. The government of Israel should evacuate the West Bank and Gaza Strip to enable Palestinians their right to have self-determination as an independent state or as a confederation with Jordan and Israel, yet no evacuation without negotiations including the PLO."

The following interviews were conducted with Israeli Arabs. I was able to speak with ten people, four females and six males. Their ages range from eighteen to sixty-five.

An eighteen year old Arab Israeli male from the Mount of Olives. He is presently working as a waiter although he was attending one of the four universities closed since the intifada began.
"Before intifada everything was good. . . we were like a family. Intifada will be finished. . . we will take our land. I want two states. People need to communicate with one another. Arafat will not be the head of the state, but rather someone from Palestine will."

A twenty-one year old Arab Israeli female from Jerusalem. She attended the Bethlehem University until it was closed two years ago.
"Intifada needs to stop now. . . there has been much killing. . . just want peace. Moslems, Christians, and Jews are becoming more religious because of the situation. Want Jerusalem to become an international city."
She states her mother feels the same way about the situation.

A twenty-one year old Arab Israeli female who is presently working at the Arab Media Center in Jerusalem. She has been employed there since the university she was attending closed.
"Intifada is good. . . it should happen. . . it must go on until we get an independent state, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. We must fight, we have no other way. Intifada proved we can do what we want. . . the conflict is not religious it is a conflict of two people. We want to live peacefully in our own land. . . the Israelis want us to be uneducated so that we will not know anything and accept their rule."
She explains her parents feel the same way she does.

A twenty-four year old Arab Israeli male from Beip Safafa. He is presently working as a waiter who finished high school and has a certificate to work on cars.
"Intifada is necessary. . . it means freedom to do what one likes and to choose one's own destiny. I want the Palestinians and Israelis to live together."
He states his opinions and his parents are the same.

A twenty-four year old Arab Israeli male from East Jerusalem. He sells diary products.
"The US has 51 states, including Israel. If they(Israel) gave more freedom in the refugee camps there wouldn't be anymore intifada. Lots of propaganda is used by the Jews to portray all Palestinians as terrorists. . . it is worse on the West Bank. What bugs the Israelis is when they cut off water to the occupied territories, the Palestinians just get used to it. Palestinians have tried in many ways to change things. . . terrorism, although I don't like it, it is a way to get attention. The Israelis don't have mercy. . . Israelis won't give land to Palestinians. Other Arab nations won't help Palestinians in Israel because they(Palestinians in Israel) are the brightest, the best educated. Some Palestinians, those in Galilee and Nazareth, feel more Israeli then Palestinian. We could live peacefully together."
He explained that some of his Arab friends do date Jewish girls although the parents don't know it because they would not approve. And he states that his parents feel the same way about the conflict as he does.

A twenty-eight year old Arab Israeli male from East Jerusalem. He cleans and sells carpeting.
"Israelis look for kids from the ages of ten to twenty-eight for throwing stones. Arab nations used Palestinians as scapegoats. . . King Hussein of Jordan had Palestinians in his nation and wanted money for these people. I want to sit and speak with Israelis. . . live together peacefully."
He does have a Jewish girlfriend and he states his parents feel the same way about intifada as he does.

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A thirty-three year old Arab Israeli male from Jerusalem. He is presently working at the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence located in Jerusalem.
"Intifada means the purification of oneself and an uprising. . . the shaking off of bad spirits so the good prevails. Intifada has four messages: (1) Palestinians want independence from Jordanian involvement in their affairs, (2) Palestinians want a political peace initiative, (3) Israel needs to leave Palestinians alone and (4) Palestinians prepare yourselves for a long intifada. I don't have a long solution to the problem. . . want to get rid of occupation and then form a Palestinian government and there will be a future. We want peace, independence, and dignity. . . we want to have our own state with Jerusalem divided, yet each side having access to the other side."

A forty-seven year old Arab Israeli female from East Jerusalem.
"Damn the intifada. . . want it to stop. . . want peace only. . . live together peacefully."
She comments that she worries about her childrens safety when they go out, especially at night.

A fifty-two year old Arab Israeli female from East Jerusalem.
"Want peace. . . worry about my children. . . no security today."
She and her son explain that when he wants to go out at night, he often takes his mother along so the soldiers will not bother him.

A sixty-five year old Arab Israeli male from East Jerusalem. He owns a carpeting business.
"Intifada must bring freedom. . . I don't want to move. . . I've always been here. . . just want peace."

B. My Conclusions

Through analyzing the interviews I have formed various conclusions which can help a teacher present this material. The conclusions are my own thus others may feel it necessary to form their own or have their students form their own (this will be explained further in the Activities section). My conclusions are:

1. there is very little interaction on a personal level between Israeli Jews and Arabs.

2. all Jewish women interviewed were willing to give up land for peace.

3. only one out of the four Arab Israeli women supported the intifada and wanted it to continue until they gained land.

4. the majority of the women, Arab and Jew, compared to the men wanted peace almost at any cost, whether it meant giving up land or not gaining land at all.

5. the majority of the Israeli Jews were willing to give up land for peace.

6. many of the Israeli Jews do not speak of giving up Jerusalem nor dividing it, but two out of the eleven stated they would not give up Jerusalem nor divide it and only one out of the eleven stated she would give up the Arab part of Jerusalem.

7. four out of the eleven Israeli Jews spoke of Jordan's involvement in a possible peace process and solution; while only one out of the ten Arab Israelis specifically stated he did not want Jordan to be involved.

8. three out of the eleven Israeli Jews stated the US needed to get involved in the conflict in order to find a solution, yet none of the Arab Israelis spoke of US involvement in solving the conflict. They tended to believe it could only be solved with the involvement of the Israeli government and the Palestinian people and their representatives, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

9. the majority of the Arab Israelis just want peace and the freedom to choose their own destiny. The Arab Israelis tended to be less specific about their demands, such as gaining land,and stressed mainly that they just wanted peace.

10. six out of the ten Arab Israeli felt intifada was necessary and/or good as a means to gain either freedom to choose their own destiny or gain land.

11. three out of the ten Arab Israelis were less willing to support the intifada, they basically just wanted peace immediately.

12. there seems to be no real difference in the opinions of the people based on age or occupation from the interviews I conducted.

Activities

1. Begin the unit by questioning the students. Have them brainstorm and write their answers on the board. Possible questions:
   What do you know about the Middle East?
   What do you know about Israel?
   What do you know about the Palestinians?
   What do you know about the Arab-Israeli conflict?
   What do you know about the current situation in Israel, especially the intifada?

2. By using a map have the students locate the Middle East, specifically Israel, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jerusalem.

3. Using slides or pictures show the students the faces of people living in Israel. See if they can tell who is an Israeli Jew and who is an Arab Israeli. Have them explain their choices and discuss them.

4. Either review the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1947 including the intifada or have the students research, write, and present information concerning the conflict.

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5. After the students have a good background on the conflict, select quotes from the interviews and ask them to decide who would have made such a statement, Israeli Jew or Arab. And then have them explain their selection.
   Possible quotes:
   "Damn the intifada. . ."
   "Want peace. . . worry about my children. . ."
   ". . . this is not a genocide just fighting for survival. . . survival means peaceful coexistence."
   "I am tired of war."
   "No matter what the Jews did the world won't like them. I don't like killing but when someone throws rocks at you and wants to destroy all of Israel kill them."

6. Using the interview material have the students work in groups to form conclusions. They should be able to answer the following questions and compare their conclusions with the rest of the class.
   What are the general similarities and differences among the Israeli Jews?
   What are the general similarities and differences among the Arab Israelis?
   Are there any similarities or differences based on age, occupation, or gender among the Arabs or Jews? If so, explain.
   What are the general similarities between the Arabs and Jews?
   What are the general differences between the Arabs and Jews?

   From the students conclusions, have them form possible solutions to this conflict. They may need to research further solutions especially those given by politicians in Israel as well as leaders of the PLO. Have them debate their solutions.

7. Have the students write a dialogue between two sixteen year olds, one Arab and one Jew. Have them present this dialogue so the class can discuss it.

Conclusion

The intifada is a situation which is ripping apart Israeli society. If something is not done another generation will be condemned to repeat the same mistakes of the last generation. Israeli Jews and Arabs owe it to their children to end the violence and bloodshed and come to an agreement that all can live with. No group will get all it desires in this conflict, yet concessions maybe easier to live with than more deaths. Listening to the people on the streets of Israel helped me to realize that peace is really what they all want. As educators I feel we need to inform our students about this conflict so that when they become our leaders hopefully they can solve the problem we have not. Maybe they will be able to "live together peacefully" because they have learned that "survival means peaceful coexistence."